

Clean-up and Site History

The Silver Bow Creek/Butte Area site is in and around Butte, Montana and includes 26 miles of stream and streamside habitat downstream from Butte. Since the late 1800s, mining wastes have been dumped into areas in and around Butte, as well as into streams and wetlands near mining operations, and smelters and mills produced aerial emissions contaminated with arsenic and heavy metals.

These activities contaminated soil, groundwater and surface water with heavy metals. In 1982, EPA proposed the Silver Bow Creek be added to the National Priority List (NPL) and it was listed as a Superfund site in 1983. Butte Area was added to the Silver Bow Creek site in 1987. Over the past 20 years, several cleanup actions have been completed, including eleven removal actions, to address immediate threats to human health and the environment.

The eleven time-critical removal actions and expedited response (Non-Time Critical Response) actions were conducted from 1987 through 2005 to address immediate and significant human health and environmental risks at BPSOU. One removal action, the Lower Area One tailings removal, was a large-scale removal of wastes within the Silver Bow Creek floodplain at the site of two former smelters and resulted in substantial improvement to Silver Bow Creek water quality and a reconstructed floodplain.

Contaminated soil has been removed from waste dumps, residential areas, railroad beds and rail yards. In addition, rail yards and residential properties have been reclaimed, a waste dump has been capped and protected, and cement channels and sedimentation ponds have been put in throughout Butte to address storm water contamination. Contamination has been removed from stream sides and channels and local area groundwater has been treated.

The cleanup plan includes further removal of lead and arsenic-contaminated soil and attic dust in homes and yards; removal of contaminated soil, sediment and tailings from around Butte; placement of contaminated materials in repositories; management of remaining wastes left in place; institutional controls; long-term operation and maintenance; treatment of contaminated surface and groundwater; and long-term environmental monitoring.

Future Work

The consent decree parties (CD Parties) which include EPA, MDEQ, Butte Silver-Bow, and Atlantic Richfield, are committed to continuing the extensive cleanup work in support of the publics and Restore Our Creek Coalition's (ROCC) vision for the Silver Bow Creek corridor on appropriate end land use development. The CD Parties end land use commitments, offered over the last several months, include:

- The Blacktail Berm, Northside Tailings, and Diggings East tailings, waste, and contaminated soils removals will be performed.
- Butte Reduction Works (BRW) tailings, waste, sediments and contaminated soils removals to be performed under remedy to provide for a clean floodplain, and the Silver Bow Creek relocation to be reconstructed through BRW corridor.

- Removal of sediments and floodplain waste along Blacktail Creek from Grove Gulch through the confluence with upper Silver Bow Creek will occur.
- Parrot Tailings to be removed under State Restoration.
- Construction of additional stormwater basins and sedimentation bays.
- Groundwater capture near the visitor's center and slag canyon to further protect surface water quality.
- Community visioning and participation to develop end land use options through the corridor.
- Additional reclamation of mining impacted sites in BPSOU.

These commitments support the CD Parties' belief that many concepts presented in the ROCC's Vision Document presented to the CD Parties' can be accommodated adjacent to the remedial elements.

EPA's Authority

The CD Parties' voluntary efforts go beyond what EPA can require under the Superfund law as part of a remedial action. A Superfund remedial action must address the release or threat of release of hazardous substances, pollutants or contaminants, and must address the prevention of unacceptable risk to human health or the environment or meet standards identified under other environmental laws.

EPA's BPSOU remedy and the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program's restoration efforts can set the stage for ROCC's vision for this area and other areas in Butte by removing buried tailings, creating a protective and connected riparian corridor adjacent to Blacktail Creek and through the Butte Reduction Works area, and further improving Silver Bow Creek water quality and habitat by controlling stormwater run-off from the Butte Hill.

The extensive cleanup efforts already accomplished in Butte are already showing success. Fish populations are present for the first time in decades. The new, proposed actions including the end land use commitments published in this document, demonstrate the CD Parties' commitment to the entire Butte community to provide for a healthy and thriving environment for Butte and Walkerville. We will continue to work with ROCC, citizens and community groups to accomplish that goal.